

A LETTER

To the Commanding General

OF THE

Fifth Military District,

FROM

COL. J. EDMONSTON, JUDGE WM.
HAWES HARRIS AND OTHERS,

On behalf of many prominent and distinguished
Constitutional Union Men
of Louisiana,

Concerning State Reconstruction
under the Constitution prescribed
by Acts of Congress.

Also, including Remarks concerning the
Ways and Means of repairing and re-
building the Levees of Louisiana.

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TO THE COMMANDING GENERAL OF THE FIFTH MILITARY DISTRICT:

GENERAL—

The determined will of the nation, now happily realized by a successful termination of the late war, together with the critical exigencies of public affairs, has made it the duty of Congress, under the requirements presented as results of the war, to review the condition of the country, and provide certain measures under a new system of political economy in order to restore to their position in this Republic those States which are now supposed to be out of the Union, and to look forward to the means of obviating dangers which may interrupt the harmony and tranquility of the Republic. The result of the mature and solemn deliberation on these momentous objects is contained in a late act and supplementary act of Congress predicated on the "Sherman Military Bill," supported by a "Bill of Rights," which have been duly promulgated to the country at large. Although these acts speak themselves the principles on which they are founded, as well as the ends which they propose, it will not be improper to enter into a few remarks concerning the expediency or necessity of complying with them. In reviewing the proposition to reconstruct these States under the Acts of Congress, we should not be unmindful of the objections which might frustrate or embarrass their unanimous adoption by the people in good faith. If the strict maxims of political economy are to be consulted as our guide, it is manifest that the means of reconstruction ought to be coexistent with the object of it; and the measures carried out in every respect under the attributes of that authority which creates the former, and alone is responsible for the latter. These measures will, we trust, be viewed on one hand as the effect of a disposition in Congress to attend at all times to the rights of the people whom they serve, and on the other hand, as a proof of their anxious desire that provision may thereby be made for an honorable and just fulfilment of the purposes and ends they have proclaimed. The expediency, and even necessity involving that change of constitution as a pre-

paratory and readjusting measure in order to reconstruct the State, would seem to present a variety of complicated contingencies, which it is to be hoped will not prove fatal to the purposes entertained by Congress. If the measures involved in reconstruction are contemplated simply as an experiment, unsupported by precedent or the experience of mankind, their execution may be attended with the most serious embarrassments and difficulties; but, if they derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and have been carried out successfully by other and long established Governments, they will then inspire that confidence which is so important and requisite to maintain a permanent system of Government. But, notwithstanding the confidence of Congress as to the success of the measures proposed, whereby the State is to be reconstructed, it is their duty to recollect that the event may possibly disappoint their expectations. The plan of readjusting the State, thus prescribed by act of Congress, must now receive its fate through the crucible of time and experience; all the objects comprised in it are conceived to be of the last importance to the welfare of this Federal Republic, and necessary to render as fruits of the war a full reward for the blood, the toils, the cares and the calamities which it has engendered. But the object of which the necessity will be peculiarly felt, now, and by those to come after us, and which it is peculiarly the duty of Congress to look to, is the necessity of securing for each State a Republican form of Government, whereby none may be deprived of their rights under the Constitution. Although the calamities which have befallen the country have been greater than would have been wished, they are still less on the whole, than could have been expected; and when referred to the cause in which they have been incurred, and compared with the ruins which wars of ambition and of vain glory have entailed on other nations, ought to be borne not only with resignation, but with cheerful fortitude.

Whatever may be the magnitude of the concessions to be made for the perpetuity of the Republic, it is sufficient for us to reflect that "*The Union must be preserved*," and to restore therein the States of the South, the mode which has, after long and elaborate discussion been preferred, is perhaps the least objectionable of any that would have been equal to the purpose. Under this persuasion, we call upon the justice and plighted faith of the State to give the reconstruction act its proper effect, to reflect on the consequences of rejecting it, and to remember that Con-

gress will not be answerable for those consequences. It is true, that neither Governments nor Constitutions should be altered or varied for light or transient causes ; for such alterations might involve a perpetuity of change, which would be fatal to the maintenance of permanent Institutions and Governments. But this reflection can now have no influence or bearing upon the predetermined, irreversible fiat and settled purpose of Congress, whereby a new Constitution is prescribed for the State, as a preliminary condition to its readmission into the Union.

In the execution of this momentous edict, upon which will depend the future "Weal or Woe" of this Commonwealth, let it be borne in mind that in the late war it has ever been proclaimed by our people, that the rights for which they contended were the rights of human nature. With a firm reliance upon the Author of these rights they have an abiding faith, that the States temporarily dissevered will be restored to Union, under such form of Government as will, upon a rational basis insure, consistently, their rights, safety and welfare.

No parallel has heretofore occurred, nor is it probable any instance will hereafter occur, where the unadulterated forms of Republican Government may have so fair an opportunity of justifying themselves by their fruits.

In this view, the people of the United States are responsible for the greatest trust ever confided to a political society. If justice, good faith, honor, and all those qualities which ennoble the character of a nation, and fulfill the ends of government, be the fruits of our institutions, the cause of liberty and Republican Government will acquire a dignity and lustre which cannot but have the most favorable influence on the rights of mankind. But still it may be feared that whoever may be at the head of the Government, and however wisely and honorably it may be administered, there can be no well grounded hope that revolution will not be repeated without many essential and well digested reforms. Whatever may be the checks and guarantees provided in the Constitution, those in power are practically under no restraint, and how pure soever their feelings and purposes, the temptations with which they are surrounded, are too many and too powerful to be easily resisted ; but as things now are, there are difficulties which scarcely any degree of talents or virtue can surmount. The experiment of establishing free institutions upon a perma-

ment basis is full of difficulties ; they may be overcome, but the task is of herculean and formidable proportions.

Some indeed contend that the problem of self-government has never yet been solved or practically carried out ; that the people are not capable of self-government ; that no people have ever yet fully and successfully exercised that attribute ! If this be true, and the people of this country are not *now* prepared to govern themselves, when will they be ?

Though the sword is returned to its scabbard, it is not yet converted (so far as the maintenance of Republican institutions is concerned) into the safer and more progressive implements of the "ploughshare and the pruning hook." Upon these alone we should rely, to provide the only secure basis for the reconstruction of the States, and thereby a reasonable prospect of the perpetuity of the Union.

When the Southern States shall have been restored to the Union under the Federal and representative principle, it is to be hoped they will again become prosperous and contented commonwealths. The representative principle is the great security of the rights of the citizen ; and it is an all sufficient security when the interests of the constituent and representative bodies are identical. The only difficulty under Republican form of Government seems to be that of combining the Federal and representative principle. How far it is practicable to combine these principles, is the great problem in political philosophy, which the people of the United States have undertaken to solve. To what extent its solution will be successful, time alone will determine.

Next to the influences excited by the reconstruction (politically) of the State, and by a suitable protection of its domestic economy, there is no other element conducive to its future prosperity in any degree equal in importance to that which may be derived from the establishment of a suitable system of levee protection against the periodical floods of the Mississippi river.

THE REMEDY.

A protective system of State levees required to secure its agricultural interests, and to facilitate the draining and reclamation of the swamp lands, thereby encouraging the developments of its resources, must be viewed as the only prerequisite measures by which the commonwealth can hope to prosper.

It would seem that the only valuable gift which a bountiful Providence

has withheld from Louisiana, is that of an immunity and security of its soil from the mighty floods of the waters of the Mississippi. When our State is relieved, and becomes secure from the paralyzing floods which periodically destroy its substance; when something is done to help a suffering people to resist successfully the calamities which have overtaken them, we may then hope that our State will again resume its former condition of prosperity.

It may well be said that industry languishes without adequate reward; and there is nothing which so stimulates production as the encouragement which an energetic Government may infuse into a commonwealth.

Without home industry and domestic production no State can prosper, no commerce can exist.

This country of Louisiana, with the aid of the Mississippi, is capable of producing every want which commerce can devise, and in the interchange of these you may build up an extensive and prosperous commerce, which will successfully rival the commercial power of Great Britain.

The Mississippi, which flows through regions, affording almost every climate inhabited by civilized man, and supplies the productions, mineral and agricultural, of every part of the globe, the peltries of the frozen forests of the Rocky Mountains, the grains of the Northwest States, the cotton, sugar and rice of the Southwestern, and lower down the fruits of the tropics; and which for two thousand miles to the Falls of St. Anthony, without any perceptible difference in the width or breadth of the stream, is bordered for the whole length with the broadest and most fertile lands in the world; then with its tributaries, the Red River, Arkansas and Missouri, navigable for three thousand miles, and terminating in as yet a "terra incognita," to say nothing of the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, and many others, any of which would be regarded as great rivers anywhere else. This majestic river, with the waters of its tributaries, conducts to our doors, and thence to the ocean, the concentrated wealth of vast and fertile regions, extending from the Rocky Mountain to the Gulf of Mexico.

Hence, the vast importance to Louisiana of a suitable system of levee protection, whereby the advantages enumerated may be available and realized.

Repeated, though futile efforts have been made by the Legislature and Levee Commissioners to rebuild the levees, but as the State had neither

resources nor credit, it was manifest that an appeal should be made to the General Government for national aid to perform the work.

Col. J. Edmonston, an eminent civil engineer, jointly, with other prominent citizens of Louisiana, were appointed by Governor Wells special Commissioners of Levees, to proceed to Washington City, and on behalf of the people of the State, to submit to the President and to the Congress of the United States their memorial upon this important subject. No action, however, could be had thereupon, inasmuch as that it was predetermined to do nothing for the Levees of Louisiana until the State should be reconstructed under acts of Congress.

Gov. Flanders, Messrs. Lawrence and Burnside essay a solution of the levee problem by resuscitating "old levee statutes" long since defunct—revival and enforcement of "dead letter levee statutes," which so far as repairing and building levees were concerned, proved a dead failure twenty years ago. Parochial police juries, syndics and inspectors to apply the "screws" to riparian land proprietors, that they may forthwith see the expediency of raising \$6,800,000 to provide a suitable system of levee protection for the State at large. The "riparians" seem to be awaiting the action of the Levee Board: but the latter would prefer to await the action of the "riparians," because, the commissioners who have gone to Wall street with the levee bonds have not yet been heard from. Therefore, the alluvial land owners must depend on their own individual resources and efforts, or be protected by the enforcement of the aforesaid "statutes," revitalized to secure the "ways and means" to provide them with levees. If the resident and non-resident proprietors demur, or can't "raise the cash," then the parochial police juries are simply instructed to call to their aid the sheriff, who will forthwith sell a sufficiency of the riparian domain to supply the means for levee purposes. To be sure, this "modus operandi" of subdividing land estates by forced sales would seem to look like an entering wedge to semi-confiscation, when we reflect that the planters and land owners generally throughout the State are *without crops* and *sans l'argent* to pay up a tax of such formidable proportions.

That the levee statutes or local laws became a "dead letter" owing to the system subsequently adopted of making appropriations for the construction of the levees out of the general fund of the State is *incorrect*; the *true cause* why those local laws became a "dead letter," was owing

to the fact that *experience proved*, many years since, after actual trial, that said laws were utterly impracticable, would not work, and could not be carried out—that the levee works were of such magnitude and so costly that individual efforts devoid of unanimity and uniformity of system, were totally inadequate to repair and rebuild them to that degree commensurate with the requirements of secure protection against the periodical floods of the Mississippi. Hence, the whole subject naturally reverted to the State government, inasmuch as it was clearly beyond the reach or control of private or parochial powers to manage. Experience, however, has shown that a secure system of levee protection is not only a local, or State question, but rises to the proportion of a subject of national concern. In view of the many abortive efforts made to secure by means of a suitable system of levee protection, the vast agricultural interests, and thereby the most valuable lands and plantations of the State from periodical overflow of the Mississippi river, it may be well to at once come to the conviction of the necessity of applying to Congress for such national aid to repair and rebuild the levees as may be consistently conceded through the guarantee by the United States of the bonds of the State of Louisiana to the amount of \$6,800,000, predicated on the proceeds of the sales of its swamp lands, and a tax imposed on all lands throughout the State subject to inundation, in order to secure the bonds and interest accruing thereon.

Throughout the State of Louisiana one thousand six hundred and forty miles of lineal and lateral levee require to be strengthened, repaired, and, to a considerable extent, reconstructed or rebuilt, to protect effectually from overflow of the waters of the Mississippi the agricultural interests of the State. Appropriations of inadequate supplies of money to be applied to patch-work at detached sections and separate points, so far as protection to levees for the agricultural districts are concerned are worse than useless, because where the levee works are continuously and connectively carried out, so as to establish an uninterrupted and perfect cord of levee embankments around the districts to be protected, detached or disconnected lines of levee works would be quickly washed away, and the money expended thereon irretrievably lost.

With yawning crevasses or breaks in the levees, through which pour the mighty waters of the Mississippi, submerging the most valuable agricultural districts of the State, and which have defied the powers and re-

sources of the Legislature and its Levee Commissioners to close or remedy; with the swamp lands, among the greatest resources of the State, unreclaimed, and unavailable for cultivation, owing to the powerless system of drainage; with a gloomy prospect of even fractional parts of crops; the soil uncultivated throughout valuable agricultural districts; with an inconsiderable commerce, inasmuch as there is little or no production to sustain it, the commonwealth in this crippled condition, without resources, consequently without credit, must now look to the United States Government for such aid as it may deem expedient to grant to repair and rebuild the levees, and thereby relieve the State from the calamities which have overtaken it.

The following communication from the pen of Colonel Edmonston, concerning the Louisiana levees and other kindred topics, will be read with interest :

POLEMICS OF LOUISIANA LEVEES.

Reconstruction of the Levees awaiting reconstruction of the State—the *sine qua non* of political regenerators.

The nervous solicitude concerning *Levee Bonds* and *Bills of Rights of Levee Commissioners*, entailing a *Levee Imbroglia*, the Gordian knot of which is finally cut by the Sheridan sabre, temporarily suspended until further information.

The physics and hydraulics of the Mississippi river are not governed by the doctrines of Radical or Conservative laws, but true to the overpowering properties of fluids will overwhelm the domain of all alike irrespective of party lines, unless they had the persuasive arguments already brought to bear throughout a large extent of submerged country as a sufficient warning for them to be up and doing—to at once provide a secure system of levee protection for the State. If there be anything true in the science of political economy, if any proposition not metamical is susceptible of demonstration, it is that an efficient system of levees is the "*sine qua non*" in Louisiana State reconstruction, because without a secure system of levee protection, the productive labor and resources of the State would be totally inadequate to provide even a revenue sufficient to defray the expense of governing it, and that owing to its present prostrate and crippled condition these levees cannot be rebuilt without national aid.

Upon this momentous question it would seem idle to assert that *something must be done* for the levees without pointing out the way how that something is to be done.

Inasmuch as it is considered that the Federal government will be called upon to perform the great work of rebuilding the levees of Louisiana, and as Congress entertains doubts as to the validity of the State provisional government, while indecision and doubtful perplexity interposed to obstruct in some degree the carrying out the act of Congress under the Sherman military bill.

When, therefore, these questions are definitely settled by Congress, then, and not till then, will the requisite means be provided to rebuild the State levees.

It would be well, therefore, for all parties concerned in the welfare of the State to lose no time in carrying out at once the act of Congress, whereby the State will forthwith be readmitted into the Union.

Then, in order to provide the State with a suitable system of levee protection, there can be no doubt that Congress will cause to be issued seven million dollars of bonds of the United States for the purpose of repairing and rebuilding the levees of Louisiana; the bonds to be payable in not less than ten nor more than thirty years, and to be secured by a tax on all the lands of the State, or, at least, on such as may be in the districts subject to inundation, as well as by a lien on seven millions of acres of such swamp lands, which will be reclaimed by the proposed work, and conveyed to the United States as additional security or as an indemnity against loss by default of the State in promptly meeting the payment of said bonds; the Federal Government permitting, by subsequent regulations, the State to save the swamp lands and appropriate the proceeds thereof to the discharge of the bonds.

In lieu of the City Council project, let the State at large send the people's commissioners to Congress for aid to rebuild the Louisiana levees; such commissioners, suitably endorsed, may elicit the favorable action of Congress in behalf of our levees; let three commissioners from this State at large and two members of the late Board, appointed by Gen. Sheridan, be the Levee Commissioners authorized by the people to apply to Congress for national aid to rebuild the State levees.

Those who favor the action herein proposed in reference to the State levees, may add their signatures to a memorial upon the subject, at the office of Simeon Belden and Judge Castanié, No. 18 Exchange Alley, at Avendano Bros., 133 Common Street, David Taylor, Old Levee, or Effingham Lawrence.

LOUISIANA LEVEE BONDS.

The people seem anxious to be informed concerning the probabilities of negotiating the Levee Bonds.

The following remarks embody the only reply I can make to the numerous letters I have received from levee contractors and others throughout the State, enquiring into the probabilities of raising money on the Levee Bonds :

Touching the request of correspondents to be informed as to whether there is any levee fund on hand available to pay up deficits on levee contracts, I can simply say, that the enquiry should be addressed to Levee Commissioners who, perhaps, may inform them, after the return of the levee mission from the North.

J. EDMONSTON,
Surveyor and Civil Engineer

For the information of all concerned, it may be announced that the levee bonds are again on the wing ! Their flight now veers West of North, to St. Louis and Cincinnati ; thence North by East, where they will finally bring up before the astonished yet familiar gaze of Gotham monied nabobs of Wall street ! Heaven help them if they bear not the potent insignia of " Uncle Sam." But we have been graciously allowed to take a peep at these irrepressible bonds, regenerated under the " vice" of Provisional Governor Flanders, in lieu of that of the late Governor Wells. We find no material difference between the new and old issue (already tried on the market by four successive commissions duly appointed to negotiate them) other than a mere alternation of Executive signature attached thereto.

Whether the new issue signed by Provisional Governor Flanders will be found more attractive without further requisite adjuncts, remains to be seen. But it seems those cute financiers who hold the Gotham purse in Wall street, can't see the force of the Louisiana Bonds as yet, with the lights now before them. They stoutly maintain that the new issue reveals only a repetition of the old story.

'Tis true the autograph of Provisional Governor Flanders is substituted in lieu of the signature of ex-Governor Wells; but still, those cute moneycrats of Wall street, obstinately persist that these bonds are nowise changed from their former defective condition, which precluded their being touched when hawked about Wall street last winter; and though aided by the promised influence of Major General Sheridan, yet the unimpressible matter of fact capitalists would prefer to see that influence brought to bear in the shape of securing the official signature of Hugh McCullough on the face of those bonds.

Repeated experiments have shown that the revenues to be raised within this State are altogether inadequate to the public wants. The deficiency can only be supplied by loans. To effect these loans the condition of the credit of the State is such that it must have recourse to the guarantee of the Federal Government to sustain that credit, until the State resources are sufficiently developed to provide for the public wants.

Therefore, to rebuild the levees, the means must be derived either from proceeds of United States Bonds for Levee purposes, or from proceeds of State Bonds guaranteed by the United States.

Louisiana wants monied capital; this capital is essentially sensitive and coquettish, and can only be approached through the medium of such securities and formalities as its potent powers may see fit to prescribe.

NATIONAL AID TO REBUILD THE LEVEES OF LOUISIANA.

In aid to the efforts which may be made by the Sheridan-Board of Levee Commissioners, to obtain national aid to repair and reconstruct the levees of Louisiana, a large number of our most prominent men throughout the State, including merchants, planters, bankers, and others of this city, in a memorial to Congress, urging on behalf of the people of

this State the necessity of the work proposed, its importance and national utility. Col. J. Edmonston, T. H. Murphy, Esq., J. Castanié, Esq., and Judge Wm. Hawes Harris, are the Special Commissioners, who will proceed to Washington, in November next, to submit said memorial to the Congress of the United States, urging the expediency of establishing a Joint Board of Levee Commissioners, to be appointed by authority of the United States and State of Louisiana, to supervise the rebuilding of the State Levees. The memorial proposes the issuing of United States bonds in lieu of Louisiana bonds, to be guaranteed by the reconveyance to the United States of the swamp lands of the State, and a tax imposed on all lands protected by the levees from overflow of the Mississippi river. It is estimated that \$6,800,000 will be required to establish a secure system of levee protection throughout the State of Louisiana.

But this vitally important work of rebuilding the levees mainly depends upon the re-establishment "into line" of this Commonwealth as a State of the Union! To the people of Louisiana is confided the important trust of electing their representatives in Convention to frame a new Constitution under the Reconstruction act of Congress, and thence their representatives in the General Assembly of the State, to be followed by the election of the Governor thereof—doubtless there will be numerous aspirants patriotically inclined to serve the State by and with the consent of the people as their Chief Magistrate. The only difficulty, therefore, will be that of selecting the proper man, and if it be true that *coming events cast their shadow before*, then, upon the outline of the political horizon, we may already distinguish who, in all probability, will be the Governor elect. Be this as it may, it would seem to be surmised that whoever reaches the chair of the Governor elect will, in all probability, reach a seat in the United States Senate, leaving the Lieutenant-Governor to guide the destinies of the State.

J. E.